

POETRY QUARTERLY

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	page 43
NICHOLAS MOORE <i>On the Ideal Beauty</i>	44
NORMAN NICHOLSON <i>Maiden's Song</i>	45
ALEX COMFORT <i>Rush</i>	46
RUTHVEN TODD <i>This Microcosm</i>	46
FRANCIS SCARFE <i>Three Sisters</i>	47
BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN <i>'You, who in April laughed'</i>	48
DENISE LEVERTOFF <i>Orphée aux Enfers</i>	48
PATRICIA LEDWARD <i>Holiday</i>	49
KENNETH GEE <i>Summer Evening</i>	49

MAURICE LINDSAY	
<i>Failure</i>	page 51
E. O. SIGLER	
<i>Aftermath</i>	52
JOHN SINGER	
<i>Time, the Great Stallion</i>	52
W. J. PENMAN	
<i>August Nineteen Forty-two</i>	53
FRED MARNAU	
<i>John</i>	54
ANTONY BROWN	
<i>Poem</i>	56
<i>Poem</i>	57
JAMES KIRKUP	
<i>The Glass Fable</i>	57
THEODORE ROETHKE	
<i>Elegy</i>	68
E. F. BROOKER	
<i>Tapestry</i>	68
REVIEWS	71

Typography by Seán Jennett

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EDITORIAL

A number of people have lately joined in the popular pastime of assessing the value of the new poets, their anthologies and collections of verse which have appeared in greater numbers in the last year or so. Many of them, nameless critics who have poached a corner in literary periodicals, do not merit our attention. Others are men of repute listened to seriously by large numbers. It is perhaps worth considering their judgments. The most important of them is Mr. Lehmann, who vigorously defends the poets of the thirties at whose expense the reaction of the younger writers has been the greatest. Neither is this unnatural. Poetry lives by change. Every generation has always turned from the work of their immediate predecessors. We are not now living in the thirties. Nor is there anything derogatory to the older poets in this fact. Young writers are, of course, easy game for the practised critic. Few people are either able or willing to remember the fact that the writer in his thirties must have much more skill in the difficult art of writing and probably more to say, unless he has become stale through a too early success. Mr. Lehmann should take care that he does not become the little green fly wrapped in its Olympian cloud of white foam, cool to look at but slimy to the touch, which hides under the rose leaf, intent on the ruin of something more beautiful than itself. The rose of the new poetry can probably look after itself. On its merits a good deal of it is bound to survive. But the careful gardener should remove the blight.

The other critic who is worth consideration is Stephen Spender. His surveys of the year's poetry appear in a good many magazines. He suffers himself from many of the faults he finds in the work of his juniors, but he is probably closer to and more in sympathy with most of them than either he or they realize. His criticism is always honest, and he appears to arrive at the cold impartiality of the judge. Judges often err but they are on the whole fair. Though it is often possible to disagree with his findings he is always interesting and sometimes profound. As a footnote to the above it may be remarked that our older poets, like T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, are making no contribution to contemporary criticism. They are giving us their best work, are responding to the stimulus of the times in a way the small man can never achieve.

NICHOLAS MOORE

On the Ideal Beauty

Out of strange paraphernalia
There comes the glimmer of an idea,
As a beautiful woman comes,
Slowly, slowly down a stair,

Pausing, pausing, and with each pause
Putting a hand up to her hair,
And glancing in the mirror
Of her own terror:

As a shy beast might come
To the cool pool for a drink,
Glancing at the irrevocable forest.
It pauses on the brink.

Then with its delicate neck stretched
Taut puts forth its tongue.
So in the ravening world,
So careless of anything

Spiritual or lovely, comes
The idea all alone,
And stands before the mirror pool
As still as a stone.

Yet from that still image
A whole world may be born,
Glorious with such beauty of rage
That none may it scorn.

In the still pool in the dark
The whorls of images reflect
A magnificent rectitude
Of body and intellect.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

Maiden's Song

(A Song of the Island)

From here the ships go out one by one,
As dawn lifts on the lilt of the tide they are gone,
Leaving the warehouses and wharves of stone.

Northward the stone breaks through the shore-line fog,
Making a wall to the turnip field, a shelter for the shepherd's
dog,
A nesting ledge for the puffin and the shag.

Daily I watch the ships
Topple beyond the horizon where the sunset dips,
Daily I hear the sea whisper with wet lips.

The ships sail to the island and never come back,
Only a broken barrel drifts against the rock,
Only a spar or a sailor's fingers tangled in the wrack.

Daily at the shingle's edge I gather wood,
And pick the sea-coal from bladders of salty weed,
Daily I feel the tug of the tide in my blood;

Yet still I remain when the ships and the gulls are gone,
Feeling the rock beneath my ankles, feeling the bone
Spliced in the iron roots of the dead stone.

ALEX COMFORT

Rush

At Rush in Ireland, near the station
crowded moving nipples of the yew bushes
carry each one at evening a dark bird
a swinging starling, moved by the wind over
the clouds' white meadows to and fro
and the fine beaks like thorns
balance high on the black corals, candles
moved by the tides of wind in air clear as water.

The air flows eastward into a blind sea
with rooks and gulls high in the current's glass
but on the yews the starlings speak the surf
out of their swinging voices the waves break:

slow from white houses spring up the weeds of fires
and the swell of darkness rocks the mourning choir. . . .

RUTHVEN TODD

This Microcosm

See in my heart the whole imagined world
Its cities and its forests fallen, see its hills
And valleys; listen to its flood of tears
Creasing the landscape, to view so often spoiled
By man, who hates and fears and dies and kills
But still remains, freighted down with years

Which would whisper to him, if they could,
His ultimate destination, the well-favoured port
Below the olive-trees, or else the anchorage of Hell
Whose unkind sands suck always at the good
Stout-timbered craft which offered him support
Against night's terrors, more than the legends tell.

See in my heart, my dear, this inexhaustible map,
Learn off by rote its travelogue of pity
And know that in your hands it is a bubble-glass
Reflecting nothing but your love, your shape,
Concerned with two only while the world's troubles pass.
One heart, at least, happy of ten million in this city.

FRANCIS SCARFE

Three Sisters

No, not so easily.
The flow
Is slow from childhood.
After years of groping
Through many mysteries
The hand falls
Gentle, cunning on beauty;
Fingers curl tendrils
But too eagerly,
Till with gripping greed
The world is bruised.

And so with all
Truth, beauty, goodness,
We grasp and strangle.
Luminous in darkness
Are those three sisters,
Not for the hand, nor for the eye,
But for the inner sense.
Apprehended, not known,
They are the poet's own,
Who meets them in absence,
In sorrow, in silence,
And is no more alone.

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

From *White Water*

'You, who in April laughed'

You, who in April laughed, a green god in the sun;
Sang in the bowel-rock below me
Words unknown, but how familiar-strange
Your voice and presence. Other quests
But led to this, to lie unseen and watch,
From cloud-ascending rib and slab of stone
Your downward passage, greendrake garmented;
A blade of wheat, watered in desolation.

O love in exile now,
I keep the hill-paths open for you; call
The shifting screes, warm rock, the corniced snows
To witness, that no wall
Precipitous, ice-tongued, shall ever stand
Between us, though we rot to feed the crow.

DENISE LEVERTOFF

Orphée aux Enfers

Constellations of the underworld
tipped from the frayed sleeve of the illusionist
retain the secrets of Persephone,
enamoured children of the pensive candle
watching through broken panes the slow kiss of spring
meet unyielding winter's leaden lips.
I with the lover of maps and firelit names,
with weeping Crito and the conjuror's foil,
and with the familiar stranger on the terrace
(he whose dark eyes are my own) recall
the curling paper of a burning dream,
traverse the colonnades of vanity,
and fortified with some unsure enchantment
descend dark crystal hills to Tartarus.

PATRICIA LEDWARD

Holiday

As children we rushed from school with the fury of leaves,
Our vision was vivid as a stream;
We lived intimately with the air and rain,
And at night we slept with the moon in our arms.

We always fled from the mad child in the village,
The boy with jerking limbs and face like cheese,
From behind his gate he laughed at us hideously,
Wildly we ran to hide, but he never gave chase.

The hills were our refuge, they went on for ever:
Times on a spring evening we would lie
Wrapped in dreams as tender as a lyric,
Searching for the stars in the darkening sky.

Neither the poacher with dead rabbit, nor the scream
Of slaughtered pig on distant farm would taint
Our minds with fear; up there we were serene,
We had attained the nirvana of the saint.

Sometimes the smell of the sticky buds and the earth
Would make our blood unquiet, our pulses beat;
We wondered why and drowsily devined the reason,
But it troubled us less than did the flapping bat.

KENNETH GEE

Summer Evening

I'd seen them one summer evening. . . . The pens are laid down,
A dead receiver gleams like a black bone where sun invades
Shut rooms. Trembling papers hold ghosts of voices that laugh now
Down the streets' airy glens. There tawny balustrades

And balconies where no girl leans, romanticise
This evening that could transform in a foreign dusk
The crowded architecture of pomp and meanness into
A city where the winter palace shines by the husk

Of a riverside hovel; storms of petals sweep over a square,
And nightly arrogant women step, with jewel and gown
Even now as the sun extends in brittle rings
Round leaves and stone and grass, the stricter prospects drown

In the light that the wind fans. Facades are shaken or flower
Strangely in the moment's disorder; window's caves
Hide the assassin and the bride in their dark recesses
And down the sea-green avenues leaves break in waves. . . .

They wait by the portico,—a payday clerk and his girl.
Summer's changing daylight winds their spiral stair
Dream on dream. A bird's flight has no more grace
Than the gay patterns, like figures of dances, their thoughts wear.

And he would deck her in garlands of roses red like wounds,
Order for her delight a banquet where negroes wait—
Lamps die over the couch loaded with fabled silks,
Outside the music fades with the day's ending fête.

This is his answer to the furs and the insolent torsos
In the sparkling foyer, to the proud head and disdainful cloak.
There fall like impassable and silencing shutters of ice
Before him, metal and glass shivering and clouded with smoke.

Night brings him to his walls. A tap drips through his dreams,
A gramophone tinkles ironic fragments of paradise;
Statues of soldiers are broken at a bugle's winding.
In waiting with the stone-still wind a stale dawn lies.

MAURICE LINDSAY

Failure

The lonely poet in his quiet room
hears thoughts that knock against his anxious heart.
shouts his hypnotic cry to men for whom
his agony is the redeeming part

of all the misery that minds have borne,
the suffering they never can atone
stripped of their smiles, and from their laughter torn
to front the winds of morning, each alone.

Against his ribs, thoughts leaden bullets turn;
around his eyes, loves waves of lusting wash;
within his ears, doubts weary candles burn;
upon his brow, the future's sorrows crash.

Acceptance is the bastard in his arms,
begot on truth from his amazed desire;
in being longed for, is the sting which harms
his endless quest, and resting, bids him tire.

Uncertain substance here his cloven days,
warm, girlish wraiths and battle-coloured griefs;
three hanging crosses at the parting ways,
new words for comfort, or betrayed beliefs.

Till, climbing with mad steps his sorrows' stairs,
loud in his head the diapasoned 'why?'
he bludgeons reason with his own despair
and thinks, not how to live, but dreams to die!

E. O. SIGLER

Aftermath

Too soon there will be singing: only he,
the tomfool before his indolent crowd,
listens for a return, pictures a shroud:
ghost of a love lost by the driving day.

Nowhere alone among their practised pride,
he gives up searching for her eyes of rest
and speaks his piece as it becomes a guest
and runs like mad the moment he's outside:

for then there'll be no chance of wasteful waiting
in case nostalgia catches up with him
and darkness finds him still about and groping

among the forlorn remains of smiles, or looting
his hours of light only to keep in trim
a torch of love before his shrine of hoping.

JOHN SINGER

Time, the Great Stallion

Time, the great stallion with ears of silk,
Swallowed a city with a night-yawn taking,
Beggared a barony with new-mown making.

And rode to hounds with a cruel homeless wind.
And took a towering ethic in its stride.
And left an empire lying on its side.

And topped and toppled man with a nameless laughter.
Smothered the running poet with his song.
Blooded two shades debating right and wrong.

Burned fifty forests in a dying kingdom.
Quickened a negative with whispered thrust.
Left a grey spinster powdery with lust.

Flooded a mine and left a tanker blazing.
Blinded a god before an earthworm gazing.

Was found on Monday morning, meek and grazing.

W. J. PENMAN

August Nineteen Forty-two

Savagery beyond the grasp of mind
Where Eastern rivers, sliding seas, divide
 The levels of the smooth corn-seas;
 Flint-hardness of the soul, and pain past shrieking;
One fate accepted: briefly to kill, and then
 Black nullity, the end;
Nightmares endure and perpetrated there
Make Summer calm for London saunterers,
Aloof researchers in still reading-rooms
And those intent on manicures or films.

All this already seen with agony,
 In Cockspur Street I saw
 Four men doggedly begging
From passers and standers by, with trumpets and banjoes
 playing.

FRED MARNAU

John

In those years after the great war lilac blossomed in plenty,
there were summers in plenty, many good things still ripened in
the autumn, and even the sick found a little time, if not healing.
Often in those years mothers died seven years, sustained careworn
the seven years and suffered seven years for the son. Thunderstorms
often encroached and rain fell in plenty, and on the rock

too there was
a little brightness. Lilies strove high and spending the overflowing,
heavy moving cup. But where the twice seven years met
there happened
the mother's death, the son's seasonless landscape became true.

The sudden break of the mother-flower which falling tore
much down
with it, at once begot that leaning to sadness, doubts, anger,
keen-caredness and indolence in suffering. Clamour arose

and soon there
was deafness everywhere, and nothing was good. But when at last he
noticed the other's deafness, quite astonished: for he could hear,
he felt as if he had to beat to pieces with fists his hearing too:
trembling of what he heard, want brought up a voice in him

which cursed
and warned, pleaded, damned and blessed, lamented. And

his ear and
his voice kept close to him, only the one grew keener, the other more
quiet, for the seven years had not been enough. When

hate's alarmcry
arose, arose from little throats, stepped up by machines into thunder,
he came to hear that now his voice was thrown away, of no use
any more. Like the others he wore hat and shirt and suit, shoes
and socks, read books, at times drank wine, and silenced he suffered
his ear and listened. Does anyone wonder at it that soon
his suit and his life seemed no longer to fit? Indeed:
every button changed, every hour, became different, was

not to be had
for money any more, was frightening, even his hair followed
an older order. Glamour and threat no longer heeding, he set out.
The sick air, half-strangled fear, the wind of death and evil clung

to him, the folds of his dress whetted poverty, drew furrows.
The son's seasonless landscape became true. Does anyone
wonder at it?

No longer he counted what he had crossed, how much sharp wire.
He seemed to walk unhindered through walls and overtook tanks
and aeroplanes, no longer felt suffering draw through him,
diseases, planted an arm in Flanders which he had found in
the streets, carried children away from dead mothers.

Clamour, o clamour,
Long since not alone any more he walked through a town, it was
towards evening, at the town's edge, the voice of clamour
cried: stand
fast. He stood. In a bundle of twelve men pressed down
against a wall,
had long stopped asking whose clamour there cried, recognised only
rifles, felt hands from the bundles sadly grasp his hands
and recognised
his landscape, said so, heard it no more and no-one heard.

Translated by ERNST SIGLER

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ANTONY BROWN

Poem

Must I face the moment
Where there is an answer
With a small word frozen
Into frightened crystal
All fantastic myriad
Childish dreams?

Then I am a pilgrim
Then I am those lovers
Long remembered, long
Forgotten: I am
All those soldiers
In unrecorded battles,

Those who dare not trust
The limit of their valour
Those whose hands have reached
Hoping to find nothing
In the final poise
Above the air, above

The crumbling hold of
Each imagination,
Coming like saints
Like beggars or the dead
Through calculated chaos
Into lonely cities

Unexplored, where clocks
Are still the arbiters.
To the tower then—
Behind ordinary shutters
Greet this living figure
Whose shadow shall be crisis.

Poem

So like one drowned you lay, close to
The receding shore, out of the turn of northern winds,
Away from the spit and fang of the waves, in
Open silence, where sea and hills crowded, under
The paling stars of an indifferent sky. And
Ghosts, known in that country, had possessed the land.

O with your white limbs still, in summer night's
Long cold embrace; the loins of winter, sloping forcing
To the water, passed you by. Stirring his pillars of scarp
Down to caves and foam-flamed islands. And
Through such darkness came a lover to withhold your dreams
Who had heard the pulse of blood in all these sleeping valleys.

JAMES KIRKUP

The Glass Fable

FOR LEONARD JONES

The young prince rides in the wood
alone, upon a crimson steed.
The green leaves are gone,
the white flowers are a ghost the rain
dissolves, and dead leaves remain.

The trees are fixed and frail
the last leaves will fall
from still boughs in air
that never moves, never,
in the windleft weather.

O the birds are folded
in the earth, and gilded
larks that once were seen
suspended singing in the sun
have fallen, and their song is done.

Beside the sad pool
that will not shake, the tall
shadows long have lain:
they will not lift in any morn
from this cool lawn.

Hushed is the simple hedge,
the hunters are departed from the lodge,
hushed is the gloomy path
where horse and rider pass,
hushed is the grass.

The young prince rides in the wood,
a crystal crown is on his head
he wanders he knows not where.
His eyes are far,
and are not fixed on any star.

His hands are pale,
within his face a white swan swims.
The reins hang.
A purple ring
he wears on either hand.

He speaks not, his tears fall on the ground.
The sun is frozen
in the distant archways of the clouds.
He wears the twilight as a veil
and darkness follows in his train.

Around his head
the night begins to brood.
Upon his shoulders slant
the last leafless shadows, and a faint
horn is sounding in his brain.

The night begins to move.
With open eyes he dreams.
The winds are low
the trees weave slow
the haunted gloom is all
around the horns are sounding
loud the crimson steed

with proud black plumes
is flying through the wood, and riderless
is flying through the world.

What hands have lifted him in sleep
and laid him down, the melancholy
rider, by the rim
of this dim pool

Why does he dream so deep
why does he sigh, and weep so
long, and does he sleep
forever, silently . . . ?

The trees are dead, the birds
all dead, the withered
leaves uncover them on every bough.
The midnight and the dungeons of the wood
by no star are visited.
Sound is prohibited.

The young prince lies in the wood
the silence listens to his dream
and calls a name
inaudible but loud
within the cloisters of his brain,
that like a crenelated cloud
rests on the crystal summit of his brow.

O, I have wandered in you, silence,
and I am not afraid
of slumber, and the dreams
that you have given me.
O leave me not alone,
O guide me by the horn's
clear, cloying voice towards the name
that only you have uttered.

The whole wood
moves in vain:
and is still again.

I am the question
only you can answer.

He rises, slowly, in a long,
slow trance
ritual, receptive
dance
an iridescent manuscript
is buried in the tomb of his loins

movement, the hands
like full swans
on the arm of the lake
extend divining fingers
the slumberer resolving
into shape and shadow-phantom
dreamily the mystery begins
to move attenuated at the wrist
of some compelling host.

.
The shepherd-boy is lost,
his sheep changed in the twilight
to white horses, and galloped to the clouds
that hung like sails among the shrouded
vessels of the wood.

He followed them,
but midnight
came in its own stillness,
and hung around his neck
and mist's solitary scarves.

His own breath
like snow pours
from the viol of his lips, that glow
white in the romantic thunder of his eyes,
in the phantom fog cocoon
that he has gathered round him
and carries, always, swooning,
like the aura of a garment.

The mist has arms
encompassing his path
and his disintegration:
see how his hair
floats out upon the gipsy air,
black and inexhaustible as fire
from the white
furnace of his skull.

His arms are stretched, and twist
like sheets of mist
the trees at anchor swim
his chrysalis of smoke contains
his heart, shaped like a moth
or the velvet arches of his mouth.
His fingers are outsprayed, distinct
pathetic feelers, and his antlered senses
radiate alarm
along the sinews of his waving form.

He is prepared
to recognize another
phantom by his yard-
long muscle and the charm
of his extended arms.

.
These two are drifting in a wood
whose trees drift where they stand
like waves round sheaves of sand
the branches drifting pass them hand to hand
and heave them silently from one
shadow to another, and from glade to glade,
raise in the white mist of midnight
moaning limbs, that terminate
in dark, interflowing deltas.

Surely they are led:
In the impromptu labyrinth
a mind detects in any wood
they wander as predestinated
to an interlocking fate.

They are quiet's children now,
the wood is all the world they know.

.

In the heart of the forest burns
a lighted palace.

The wanderers
are drawn,
the brazier, the radiant lung
inhales them,
their hands are hauled
back into the body.
The prince is at the door,
before a golden window
the shepherd-boy is seen
his face is glimmering like swans
through countless dark, translucent screens
they pass like spectres through the glass,
as leaves sink through the surface of a lake.

.

The stairways like marble winds are borne
to every room upon the branching
coral tree of walls and domes
the candelabra germinate and creep
with tapers growing crystalline like fruits
to alcoves of trellised ivory, where mirrors sit
and multiply the slowly-bursting candlelight
upon the spreading foliage of rampant tapestries
that weave like plants their jewels ceaselessly into the air of
every room.

The crystal floors are deep, and spring
from wells of molten glass, the rooted walls
that fluctuate are fluted coral cliffs
rising from the antipodes, and lift
diminishing perspectives, turrets, towers,
pinnacles and spires, suspended in the summit of the dark.
And over all a gray arch bends
in which is hung one soundless, cloud-filled bell
that listens in the centre of the night.

This is a petrification that can breathe and stir.
From hidden, countless stars the pillars
hang like stalactites; and pedestals
emerge and grow from bases in the floor;
the cornices and parapets along the topless halls
are fashioning their own design,
and put forth ornament and peristyle
capital and plinth, as any growing plant
delivers stems of flowers to the air.

A single stairway centres on the top-
most minaret, and spirals into space.
The catacombs, the yawning mines that blaze
like jellied sea-caves, noiseless cataracts of diamonds,
the firmaments of toppling chrysoprase
hold fixed sapphire comets and large,
slow, slowly-falling shooting-stars
that sink and burn continually in
the ponds of gold, the lakes of liquid, violet glass.

In all the air a strange hush hangs,
as if a multitude had vanished:
the lutes, the lyres, and the harps
that lean their heavy, gilded wings from galleries of clouds
await the touch and the return of invalid musicians:
the empty crescent of a ballroom
hovers fluorescent on the dark—a masquerade
of dancers has dissolved, here, and fallen
inexplicably into the darkened radius of the moon.

Stairway, still
whirlwind perpetuating
stone's tragic sense,
your soaring avenues of torches
are launched into the night

Behold, a prince descends,
alone, and dreaming of an end
to which he now proceeds
unknowingly.

Behold, a shepherd-boy ascends
in endless garments from the throbbing mines;
he holds in either hand
a jewelled pearl.
There were his tears.

.
A sound of growing
as the floors begin
to soar and move
the walls are thin
as water on a window.
O the sound of harps
is rising all around
the doors are opening upon the night
the torches and the candlelight
are swaying and the palace sways
and shudders, and the gray bell booms.

The dancers are returned
the crystal pilasters dissolve
and draw down stars upon their heads
the stairways writhe and
vanish howling like a tempest in the roof
the dancers weave and rise
with trailing gowns and in a long
bright chain of veils they fly
from room to room and through
the backless mirrors, waving,
calling, rising and receding,
in an ocean of delirium dive.

The lame musicians
float melodiously upon a balcony of cloud
until the lutes, the lyres and the harps
the calling voices are no longer heard
and dwindle screaming down the parapets of dark.

The winds beat in the expanding domes
the young prince and the shepherd-boy are dumb

with dreams, and gaze around for love,
plumb with distended pupils
real depths of stone.

O jasmine, jasmine,
the hyacinths are done
the forest is a fragment ghost

diminishing arcades
the leaves
invade the dream's
opened dome,
death is remembrance.

Burn, fountains,
in the absolute

Sphinx,
rose of the desert,
face in a thousand gardens . . .

These are shouldering
the stony glitter of a dream,
and cannot move, except
to scream, silently, inwards.

The ballroom walls are flowing glass
the floors are melting fast
and in the semi-distance of the caves
the burning gems are seen extending
endlessly in adamantine waves,
and tides of onyx
pour in avalanches down
deep deliquescent graves.

Under the disintegrating domes
the wild, heaving tents of stone
the velvet hurricanes of air
with banisters of running fire, flights
of streaming stairs, and whorls
of whirled-up glass, they meet,
the long-lost strangers, in a surging hall
of amaranthine jade that furls like silk:

the gliding pedestals, exfoliate, and leave
their moving emptiness, a memory,
and here they pause

the wanderers, the flame-shaped dreamers.

.

The music falls
here in this raging anteroom of flight;
within the crashing arch that buttresses
the split stone of space,
the bell tolls.

And here, with extended arms,
blindly, they move to meet
oblivion or the swans
of iron madness. . . .

Alas, who
will recognize them then?

.

Blast, trumpets, in the collapsing void,
blast, blast, drums,
within the shaking chasms of the hills
Shrill, fifes, shrill shrill shrill,
and Light, connect and end

Bursts the steed, bursts spilling crimson
with thunder through the final walls.
The prince is whirled into the west.
The shepherd-boy has fled, and climbs
the one inevitable stairway to his end.
The remnants of the palace
rise up like a curtain,
and in his closing eyes are turned
to distant, heavy draperies, that gleam,
the fold-on-fold aurora,
the winter dream.

.

The young prince rides in the wood,
alone, upon a crimson steed.
The morning light has moved
among the trees,
the winter is departed from the glade.

The shepherd-boy is far
upon a sunny mountain-crest.
He lies face-upwards to the spring,
out of his breast
a hyacinth has sprung.

And in the wood the flowers lie
in shining glass among the singing trees.
Like a dark
portrait, surrounded
by its own stillness, see,
(o, let him pass—
the young prince riding in the wood.

THEODORE ROETHKE

Elegy

Her leaf-like hands on the long branches of willow
Move in my eyes as they move on the face of the river.
The long willow arms bend with the wind but do not beckon.
Whatever shines or reflects returns me that image.

But her voice, light as a brook over stones, I cannot remember,
Though I listen at the wind's heart, at the center of whirling water,
Or wait by cold rocks in the stillness of low country.
My ears stay on the stretch for that unearthly timbre.

E. F. BROOKER

Tapestry

Far to the end of sight the stars of iris rise
Lighting with opal fire the dry wind-grass.
On slow and slender feet they step to where the long lake lies,
A jewelled sword along the plain.
They peer within the water at the glow
Of emerald and amethyst and jade;
Beside the dark of rushes at the rim
They lift exotic heads and spear-long leaves.
While coolly, in the cloisters of the mere, great amber fish,
In gloom of indigo and green, glide with a flash of silver fin
Across the deep-drowned stones.
There all is still: still as the deepest sea
Below the sob and rush of wave above; down under tides that
 run and tear and hiss
Where empty stand the endless palaces of sea;
And echoless the halls.

Low by the lake shore;
In high air:
Are sounds and music of a passing Emperor.

For once this way came caravan and king
And bronze and silver-throated music rent the air.
The little, smiling queens came with their train
And laughed their silken laughter. On their feet
The golden anklets tinkled where they trod
And music made their bracelets when they danced.
Smooth hair burned black beneath the spires
Of pearls, and silver wrought like lace winked in their crowns.
Their gowns were fine as gossamer and gay
With peacock colours; azure, cinnamon and red.
And swinging cloaks they wore of silk
From Srinagar.
Here in the breathlessness of torrid noon
The white plumed fans moved in the windless air;
And gleaming birds flashed in the evening trees.

Warriors there were, in clashing, ringing arms,
Their copper helmets burnished as their shields.
Tireless they strode. An army with its king;
And down the plain the copper river moved
As, shining in the sun, their shields and arms
Sparkled and flashed and glowed till out of sight.

Came camels grunting with the weight of merchandise
From Samarcand, Bokhara, Mandalay.
Long through the night they toiled across the plain
And lifted dust far older than the moon,
And camel-bells tossed silver in the dark; in cooling air
The riders called the halt.
Here, when the windy night dropped to the quiet hills
The campfires crackled red and dark smoke rose,
And camel-men sang gruffly till they slept.
In darkness, lit by water-mirrored stars,
The beasts of burden lumbered to the lake.

High in the swaying palanquin of pearl,
In turbaned pomp, with scimitar aflame,
His scabbard dark with rubies as a wound,
The Khan, Prince of ten thousand tribesmen rose in state
And marvelled at the beauty of his land.
The snarling horn re-echoed from the hills
And elephants, in glittering array, came up behind the royal canopy.

From some high pass a drummer struck his drum,
And all the listening mountains took the sound
Far to some distant drummer leagues away
To tell him of the coming of the Khan.

Toiling, the throng behind
Were those that follow in the wake of kings.
A company of slaves, sweat-blinded and with bleeding feet; their
backs
Deep-bitten by the seeking lash; new wounds broke red on old;
Dragging the accoutrements; the lances, mail, the cuirass, the
battering-ram and rod;
Of moving armies.
With choking breath, far out across the land they sent
Their song; a tale of dull and dead despair and pain and hate.
Loud rang the flying whip along the line and stilled the song.
Till when, with memory old for pain, in little time, the song
Rose in the air about the lake and made an echo in the dome of time.

Here in some soaring temple, in time gone,
To plaintive music from the lilting reeds,
The slender apsaras swayed in the dance, and told
In postures, to the thin high notes, the tale
Of things long passed, and mystic ones long dead.
Of J inghis Khan and all his hordes,
And blood that flowed as monsoon water in the spring.
Of Tartar legions swarming through the pass
Into the gracious open plain.
And other tales they told in miming dance
Of palaces and wealth and pageantry and wedding feasts and wars
And love and death.
The trembling music followed with the dance
And lifted from the instruments and rose
In towers of melody, till lost, with all the silent music ever made
It hung, within the air, far out of sound.

And so the sweet lake air
Recalled the music and the song long still,
And all about the lake and on the endless hills,
To the far mountains where no iris grow
Down to the plain, into the farthest air
Was all the silent singing of remembered song.

REVIEWS

SEÁN JENNETT, *Always Adam* (Faber, 6s.)

Seán Jennett, who is already known to readers of POETRY QUARTERLY and POETRY LONDON, is introduced to a wider public with a major warning and a major claim: 'We may warn those who take an interest in contemporary verse chiefly as a sociological document, that we publish these poems chiefly as good writing.' In reply, we might warn the publisher that the social document and good writing do not necessarily exclude each other. As sociological document there is nothing new about Jennett's work: there is the already very familiar background of being Irish, the pre-war café, reactions against the war, fire-watching, and a pale religious feeling. We do not reproach Jennett with not having a mature view of the world, for indeed he has not had time to develop one; but it is certain that, as yet, he has no original outlook on life. He is less concerned than, say, Adam Drinan, with the roots of evil. He dislikes clerks, is sentimental about soldiers, but shows little feeling for people as individuals, in their relation to the soil and slum. But, accepting this fact, it remains to be seen whether this stands as 'good writing'. Many of us have been longing for a book of poems from which the war might be absent; it would be rather a relief to find one. It would be rather a relief also to look only for good writing, but there has been so little of it in recent years that criticism, like the novel and poetry, has become increasingly 'sociological' in bearing.

Good writing, so far as poetry is concerned, presupposes a profound knowledge of the craft, an experienced sensitiveness to words, a sense of balance and completeness. This knowledge of form, and feeling for it, are still not enough unless the writer, striking deep into the truth of life, can so move the mind, the senses, the spirit, the imagination of the reader, that the reader is brought beyond himself, to become also, for a moment at least, a poet. By such standards, very little modern poetry would rise to our requirements. We have much that is competent, or that is stimulating, or that will pass muster, but very little that we can keep for ever with us.

Seán Jennett is a promising poet; he promises to be a poet. He is already interesting, which is half the battle. But 'good writing'

excludes the many lapses of taste of which he is guilty in this book. Had there been only half these poems, the book might have been good, but he prints here poems which must have been written at school, and which do not hide the fact, and they are far from good.

*'brains impenetrably sable
beneath the black skirts of the naked globe
paddle with ghostly fingers in the flow
of President's very démodé ideas
(haphazardly hopping about like poured-out peas:
they did when he was a boy).'*

He ends a more readable poem with:

*'... while we in that hill shelter
Watched the disintegration of two marvellous years
And made a coffin for their decent burial.'*

Here, (*two marvellous years*), a poem with a broad appeal is suddenly narrowed to privacy by the 'two', while the last line's banality spoils the whole poem. To conclude the destructive side of our criticism, we might take a short poem written on a serious level, and which has something to recommend it. The poem 'Nirvana' runs:

*'In a hollow of the hills, under a dappled sky,
under the rain and the windy murmur of heathèr,
I looked for you in the eyes of the level pools,
looked for your hidden heart, huddled under the hills.
Under the drabbled, dew-dabbled eye of the moss-soft morning
I searched tilt my groping fingers fixed on a ghostly heart:
The glittering lamps dripped down from the haunches of hills
to a smouldering town, while I waded the wetness apart.'*

It would be foolish to approach poetry merely from the point of view of the logician, though in fact much criticism has no broader understanding of poetry than to do this. I believe that poetry can be apprehended, when it cannot logically be explained by habitual processes of thought. In these four lines of Burns, for instance, we are obliged to use two distinct types of understanding:

*'My luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
My luve is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.'*

In the first comparison the analogy is readily grasped: rose, symbol of love; rose, red as a young lady blushing; rose, fragile and pleasing; rose natural, rose fragrant, rose warm and fresh as summer. But the second comparison hangs by a thread; we tend to accept it unquestioningly, but its implications are not so readily understood by logical processes. We are driven finally to the conclusion that, because the melody sweetly played in tune enters into the category of beautiful or pleasing experiences, it is thus arbitrarily selected and set beside the rose and the woman. This, however, we do not need to arrive at by logic, and in my experience I accepted these last two lines unconditionally for years, until I realized that I had apprehended rather than understood them.

The same applies, though in another degree, to these lines of Seán Jennett's. I feel that he has taken a further step, which my apprehension cannot follow. This experience is beyond reality. I feel that there is some symbolism here, the clue of which is beyond me, for true symbolism should work on two or more planes, and here the second plane is so hidden that the reader is in the dark. What or whose is the 'ghostly heart' in the above poem? Does the poet know, or is this a case of induced experience, something existing only on paper and not in the emotional life of its creator? I do not think a man who was not a poet could, in any case, write such lines; but Jennett can be a better poet than this, if he will not let mysticism entirely cloud his vision.

There are some very pleasing poems in this book, which compensate for the lapses I have mentioned. Sometimes, even when matching himself against a now famous poet, he can hold his own:

*'Spring strikes and rings the root to song
and ravel out the tangled leaf in revels
of live green along the girdering iron branch,
and swings with sway of wind in grass the meadow levels.'*

And the slighthness of his poems should not be too much held against them, when they reach the level of that short lyric beginning:

*'To see you sitting in the other chair
had been the ultimate, the wished-for thing.'*

This poem, and others like it, show that poetry has stronger roots in known and common experience than in such esoteric mysticism, badly founded in experience, such as prompted the 'ghostly heart'.

FRANCIS SCARFE

T. R. HODGSON, *This Life. This Death* (Routledge, 5s.); ALAN ROOK, *These are My Comrades* (Routledge, 5s.); Essays by HERBERT READ, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (Routledge, 7s. 6d.).

I had never before seen any of the work of Tom Hodgson. Almost his entire poetic output, up to the time when he was killed in action, is in this book. It begins with early and very immature work—fragments and occasional pieces, and ends with lyrics written in 1941, which are enough to show that a very great talent was extinguished when he died. Rook's collection is his second book of poems, and seems to be made up of work written at leisure and not under the pressure of experience which produced his Dunkirk poems. I consider these poems together because of their common background. They both come of a generation who fully *expected*, since adolescence, to be killed in action. Hodgkin, throughout his work, presses forward towards that. Rook, as a soldier, projects this end into the persons of his comrades, who are in immediate peril when he no longer is. In this mission of speaking *for* others, *Soldiers, this Solitude* was a far more successful book than the present larger volume of Rook. Since the last collection appeared, Rook has fallen under the influence not of Lorca himself, but of Spender and Gili's translation of Lorca. The results are disastrous and, as far as I was concerned, infuriating. It is possible to detect not merely echoes but sequences of echoes, which make it quite clear which poem the poet had running in his mind when he wrote. Echoes are not all blemishes, but when they obtrude without attaining the status of quotations they destroy much of the effect which the author intended. A few examples will show what I mean—in one poem:

ROOK: '... deep
in the heart is the tramp of horses.
Behind us the sea with secret hands is moulding
the history of faceless people. . . .
There is no one here owning the bond of friendship
but feels the skull washed clean by the sea's retreating;
no one who has lost himself
is ignorant of the power of water
. . . the hard escarpment of bone'

LORCA: *'There is no-one who, in giving a kiss
does not feel the smile of faceless people—
no-one who, in touching a newborn child
can forget the motionless horse skulls. . . .'*

The phrases are echoic and sometimes identical—'la sonrisa de la gente sin rostro'—'un duro paisaje de heuso . . .' or near-identical 'no-one who has lost himself' and

*'Como me pierdo en la corazon de algunos niños
me he perdido muchas veces por el mar. . . .'*

I do not want to appear unreasonably critical, but to my mind neither Rook nor Lorca gains by this. Rook does not improve or even elaborate the original, and his form reflects the peculiar diction of the translation and not Lorca's own traditionally planned formal schemes. There is scattered throughout the less obviously derivative poems a pseudo-Lorcan apparatus of carnations, nard, fishes, and so forth, and the work reads as a translation. They are certainly not jottings, as the preface says, from a notebook of current experience, but far more a record of the poet's reading.

But as against these poems, there are five poems at the end of the book which surpass in technique and in feeling anything that Rook has so far written. It is obvious that the Lorca episode is over, and the poet is finding himself again as an individual, presumably with the lessons of Lorca learned and digested to a manageable form. Rook was never more robust and personal than in 'Harvest', although the last poem of all, 'Is it Death?' takes a stanza bodily out of the 'Llanto':

*'Now I want to consort with captains
with iron voices and reins of horses,
with men who know the subtleties of triggers
the sonorous smell of powder. . . .!'*

It is not hard to pay tribute to Hodgson's potentialities, but it is hard to assess his achievement. There are poems as good as any which have been written during or about the war—*Searchlights over Berlin*—and there is a lyrical diction which is entirely his own. We are reading work which shows the poet's entire progress, and work which was never revised for publication. There are obsessing words like 'murmurous' and an influence derived again from the Spanish, but utterly different from Rook's decanting of Lorca. Hodgson arrived at the feeling of Lorca, not his diction. He shared in himself the tragic sense of life. The parallel that one can most readily draw is with the work of Gervase Stewart—the premonition

and the facing of it, the enjoyment and renunciation of the last years, the affirmation that it was destiny which he was dying for, not the hope of achieving any material purpose by death. Both Hodgson and Stewart faced death in the spirit that being of their time they must die so, but without any hope of altering history or upholding a cause. That two such talents should have been lost is an irreparable defeat in itself. Every page of Hodgson's book shows advance towards a more certain poetry.

*'Already the mosses and grasses
with sure fingers open
the flower of his skull. . .'*

Read's essays are the key to everything which the younger writers of this war expect, practise and believe. He, as nobody else, has an insight into the significance of the times and into the place of the artist in them, which will survive analysis on paper. Others of us know what we want and what we believe, but can bring it to no more explicit form than poetry, which deals with associations too fragile to state outright in prose. Most of his best essays of the last few years are here, including *'To Hell with Culture'*. I do not think it is possible to overestimate Read's personal influence through his writings on the development of poetry since 1938. He has stood in much the same relation to the younger writers as Godwin did to the earlier romantics. In *'The Politics of the Unpolitical'* he has coined a phrase which will play a great part in the struggle between anarchism and authoritarianism which will follow the war. Poets will have to learn to exist in the structure of an authoritarian state as dissentients, hiding their dissent and practising their art secretly. I can envisage the punishment of poetry as an activity in itself. Read has shown us which way events are moving. The indissoluble alliance between art and anarchism, anarchism and the artistic attitude to society was virtually his own discovery. It may prove to be the ruling principle of the coming history of all European art.

ALEX COMFORT

JEAN FULLER, *My Love to Thee* (Unwin Brothers, 5s.); LORD DUNSANY, *Wandering Songs* (Hutchinson, 2s. 6d.).

The temperaments of these two poets are radically different: so are the metres they use, but they have one thing in common—that they are struggling, with occasional success, to adapt modern words and ideas to a traditional technique.

Jean Fuller's poetry is intensely personal, being a description by means of short lyrics of an overwhelming love. Frequently the effect is bathetic as when she describes how she gets eggs and tea while thinking of her lover, but the final impression is one of pathos. One feels that out of emotions which are often girlish she has managed to extract something of the dignity of a tragic love affair, but her poetic gift is limited to small impressions and a gift for phrases.

Lord Dunsany is more definitely a poet. But he is emphatically a minor poet. A master of occasional verse, especially the epigram, with an eye for the story in what he sees, but unfortunately that eye is too ready to water at sentiment when it might well flash with indignation. Only one poem, about Greek refugees, achieves anything like dignity, and far too often travels through Greece, Turkey, Egypt and South Africa produce only the most banal thoughts.

Unkind as it may sound, one must describe Lord Dunsany as the ideal after-dinner poet,—after a good dinner.

JOHN BAYLISS

C. M. BOWRA, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (Macmillan, 15s.)

In very lucid prose which shines occasionally with the lights of old silver highly polished, Dr. Bowra assesses the achievements of the post symbolists. There are individual studies of five poets, Paul Valéry—by far the best because, perhaps, the most sympathetic—Rilke, Stefan George, Blok and Yeats—the last being the most disappointing. There is a careful painting of the background of the work of each poet, quotations from the German are translated at the foot of the page, and the Russian author is quoted in English which it is to be hoped does him no justice. In an introduction the aims of the Symbolist movement are described, the search for an ideal beauty in the harsh ugly world of the unrestricted predominance of modern industrialism so lightly ignored by the lovers of the gay nineties. He points out how these poets were driven by the undermining of the fabric of their Christian beliefs to seek a gospel elsewhere and found it in the ideal of the Beautiful with a capital B. 'Le Beau' has acquired the patina of an object which has survived long beyond its time. But time itself is perhaps our hardest lesson. Is there not something familiar about all this that reminds us of the present when the new generation is

beginning to know the meaning of the failure of Christianity and turning back on itself, trusting nothing but the truth it finds only in its own art? A great deal of what was said of the Symbolists is repeated by the massed forces of Philistinism about the difficulties of *understanding* modern poetry today. The poet who writes now for the small magazines catering for intellectuals cuts himself off from the larger public and his work is appreciated only by a cultivated few exactly as fifty years ago. The problem is the same. Dr. Bowra shows how the successors of the symbolists solved it. He realizes how much poetry lives and thrives on change.

In a concluding chapter he discusses the changes in the conception of poetry held by each generation and what the public expects of the poet, how the scientist, the astronomer, the psychologist compete with him for attention, and how the poet has turned to the magical view of his art, has become the 'vates', the instrument of unseen powers. These pages are perhaps the most interesting and stimulating in the book. He is on less certain ground when he writes of the successors of the post symbolists, comparing the older and the younger poets' attitude to machinery. There was indeed a period when poems were plastered with pylons, but it produced very little of worth, and that not concerned with machinery. When he says that the moderns have invented a poetry of the commonplace, surely he is unfamiliar with the feeling abroad among the younger writers and is thinking of the poets of the thirties who did so much to lower the dignity of poetry and bring it into disrepute with the common man to whom they supposedly appealed. Nearly every sentence which Dr. Bowra uses in defence of the post symbolists might be written of the young poet emerging from obscurity today. Finally, the claim is made that there is a place in the modern world for poetry. This is an era of struggle and destruction when even the brief periods of peace are unsatisfactory and full of a sense of trifling with vital issues. But 'The greater the disaster, the greater the chance for the poet', he writes, 'Out of blood and storm he has won glory.'

This book is of great importance to all interested in the theory and practice of poetry, and is of particular value to those who see in the freedom of the poet, in the unique position which he occupies the only hope of a saner world. There are many indications that the Symbolist movement, having produced some of the greatest names in European art and letters of the last fifty years, is not a dead tradition.

WREY GARDINER

HERBERT PALMER, *Season and Festival* (Faber, 2s. 6d.); DOUGLAS GIBSON, *Thirty-three Poems* (King, Littlewood & King, 1s.); *Ulster Voices* (75, Great Victoria Street, Belfast, 4d.); IDRIS DAVIES, *The Angry Summer* (Faber, 6s.); EDITH SITWELL, *A Poet's Notebook* (Macmillan, 10s. 6d.).

Mr. Palmer is boring when he is not irritating. He has tried so hard not to be Georgian, not to be dull, not to be ordinary that whatever genuine talent he had has been stifled. He is, as could be seen from his book of criticism, lamentably lacking in taste; and his lack of any critical faculty causes him to write verse twice as badly as he criticises it.

He writes an introduction to Mr. Gibson's volume, in which he calls him a 'Sun-poet'. He also speaks of 'the felicity of his exits and entrances, his endings and beginnings'. 'He never begins a poem badly', he says.

*'Oh, to lie in the sun
Forever, and to be done
With the world and the worry,
The books and the scurry!'*

is the beginning of one of Mr. Gibson's poems. He keeps up this level throughout. What more can one say?

Ulster Voices, on the other hand, is unpretentious and pleasant; it consists of poems by Roy McFadden and Robert Greacen, carefully written and serious poems. Given the encouragement, further similar broadsheets are promised. I think from this one that the venture is worth encouraging.

The Angry Summer is a strange and beautiful book. It is a sequence of poems about the General Strike of 1926. They have a simplicity that is awe-inspiring, for, though they are simple and straightforward, they are something more than mere reportage. Many of the lyrics are excellent in themselves—of course, some are better than others—and the total effect is most impressive. This is the kind of book that should be a best seller, for it has all the virtues of a controlled and genuine popular poetry: that is to say, it is, unlike most popular poetry, both poetry and easy to understand. It is a beautifully produced book, and there ought to be a rush on it. I'm afraid there won't be, because isn't it usually the Stitches and Stronges or the Palmers and Gibsons that the great British public roars for, while for the intellectuals probably such simplicity will not seem a virtue at first sight. However, for those who are not bound by either of these limitations it should be a very welcome book.

Miss Sitwell's book, *A Poet's Notebook*, is also a beautiful book. It is, however, difficult to review, for it is so packed with wealth that one does not know where to begin. For it is exactly what it says it is, a poet's notebook; in other words, the notes are notes, and are not expanded. This necessarily means that there is an immense amount of material in a very small space.

The first part of the book consists of aphorisms on various subjects, such as 'On the Poet's Nature' or 'On Rhythm', aphorisms that Miss Sitwell has extracted from a wide variety of sources. Sometimes they are presented without comment, sometimes she comments on them. All of them give food for thought: few of them are sufficiently simple to be taken lightly and easily. This is a professional book. It will not interest the amateur. I do not mean that it is exclusively for poets, but that it *is* exclusively for those who have a serious interest in poetry. It will not appeal to those who like light chit-chat about literature.

It is, of course, a personal book. There is much in it that will seem true to anyone, but as Miss Sitwell points out, it *is her* notebook, and it should therefore not be judged as a public anthology. She has not made notes on what she already considers obvious or collected aphorisms, however good, that do not have any application for her.

The section I find most striking and which is perhaps most needed today is the section on Form. Miss Sitwell quotes Coleridge among others: 'The true . . . mistake lies in the confounding of mechanical regularity with organic form. The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material; as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops, itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with . . . its outward form.' This is but one of many important quotations. Blake, Cocteau and Wagner are quoted extensively. And Whitman, too.

After the aphorisms there are longer notes on various individual poets, Herrick and Shakespeare, for example. These, too, contain matter of great interest and importance, though I myself value the aphorisms with her comments on them most of all.

This book should be indispensable to every serious reader or writer of poetry.

NICHOLAS MOORE